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TOP BUSH AIDE TIED TO SECRET CONTRA OPERATION

By RACHEL FLICK
WASHINGTON — A top aide to Vice President George Bush has been linked to a secret contra operation that was run by the man who played a key role in the sale of U.S. arms to Iran.

Donald Gregg, Bush's foreign policy expert, reportedly had hired a former CIA man to help provide supplies for the Nicaraguan rebels.

That operation — which came to light after pilot Eugene Hasenfus was shot down — was reportedly financed by retired Maj. Gen. Richard Secord.

This week The Post reported that Secord, formerly a top Defense Dept. official, handled the Iranian arms money that was funneled to the contras.

The Gregg-Secord connection is part of an emerging web of contacts in the complex Nicaragua-Iran affair that apparently also involves Saudi Arabia.

Gregg, a former CIA station chief, is known to have close ties to Saudi officials and to former colonel Robert Lilac, who now works for Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador to Washington.

Lilac is a longtime associate of Secord.

The Saudi connection is significant because of reports that the Saudis were the source of the money paid for U.S. arms that were shipped over the last year to Iran.

Bush's own ties to the Saudis were illustrated this week when — according to a top-

level government source — the vice president invited Prince Bandar and Lilac to a private viewing of the movie "Top Gun."

Bush, a former head of the CIA, remained out of sight in Washington yesterday and his spokesman was unavailable for comment.

Gregg first attracted attention when it was reported that he had hired former CIA aide Max Gomez to run the airlift of military supplies to aid the contras.

In the 1970s Gregg served as the CIA's station chief in Seoul, Korea, and as President Carter's intelligence liaison with the National Security Council.

One source told The Post that under Bush, Gregg has involved himself in foreign policy matters in every region of the globe — while keeping out of sight.

"He was on the CIA," the source said. "He was on the dark side of the house."

Lilac — a former NSC staffer — and Secord have worked together to arrange official U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia, including the 1981 AWACS sale.